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# Electronic Journal of Academic and Special Librarianship



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## Vodcasting, iTunes U, and Faculty Collaboration

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### Introduction

In the summer of 2008, the Miami University Libraries began a pilot project to integrate Web video tutorials (vodcasts) into a multiplicity of access points to enhance and extend library services. By the end of the project, Web video tutorials had been embedded in specific course sites in the course management system Blackboard, as well as in our institution's iTunes U site. The libraries were, in fact, the first entity on campus to feature publicly-available content on iTunes U. This brief article will delineate the project and explain why we believe this effort has helped position the library within the framework of our users' information-seeking behavior.

### Recognition of Current Environment

The idea for this project was forged after we considered a number of factors. First, we reviewed the current technological trends evident within our user base, including the ubiquity and accessibility of Web video, the trend towards Mac usage on our campus, and the prevalence of iPods. Secondly, we considered some of our institutions' unique needs and pedagogical trends, primarily the need for additional reference coverage and our university's experiment with the idea of the inverted classroom. Finally, we assessed the libraries' unique resources and relationships. We determined that we were ideally positioned to explore Web video as a means of providing reference and instruction, chiefly due to the availability of video-editing software within the Miami University Libraries and our institution's previously formed relationship with iTunes U. iTunes U is a service provided by Apple Corp. that facilitates the distribution of

course-related materials and other academic content using the widely-used iTunes platform. Because iTunes U functions much like the iTunes store, students are familiar with the interface. Also, iTunes makes it easy to export content to the iPod, so students are able to carry instructional content made available on the system with them.

Many academic libraries are experimenting with video tutorials or vodcasts as a means of reference and instruction. Xiao et al at Texas A & M implemented a Web video project similar to our experience in 2003<sup>1</sup>. The UCLA Libraries took a very creative approach and employed student workers to shoot and edit the videos and transmitted them via the residence halls cable station<sup>2</sup>. Other prominent libraries that have experimented with this are the Arizona State University Libraries<sup>3</sup> and the M.I.T. Libraries<sup>4</sup>. However, only a few are making these vodcasts available via iTunes U. We feel that this makes our project relatively unique.

## **Web Video**

The 2008 Horizon Report, which discusses technological trends likely to have an impact on teaching and learning, listed what they called "Grassroots Video" as a technology that will be adopted in a widespread manner in one year or less<sup>5</sup>. Their discussion of this technology prompted the initialization of this project. The report argues that the notion of useful and engaging videos has changed with the increase in user-generated videos, represented by YouTube. Now, short (three to five minute) videos viewable on a three-inch player in a Web browser or on a mobile phone or iPod are considered useful and engaging. It also notes that the cost and complexity of video production has dropped dramatically in recent years, allowing more people the ability to create useful, engaging, and entertaining Web videos.

Another very important trend that we considered is how often our user base consumes Web video. This is obviously an important trend to monitor as we attempt to position our services within their information-seeking behavior. The Pew Internet and American Life Project report entitled *Online Video* found that "Young adults (those ages 18-29) are among the most voracious video viewers." Three in four young adult Internet users (76%) report online consumption of video, compared with 57% of online adults ages 30-49<sup>6</sup>. Clearly this is a type of media with which our user base is comfortable. Another key aspect of this report notes that 67% of young adult Internet users *share* videos with others. This is important because if one of our users finds a video tutorial enlightening, they may send it on to a fellow student. By the act of sharing, the original user has given it their stamp of approval in a sense, and the friend receiving it will consider it of greater import than if it were sent by a librarian or teacher.

## **Unique Needs and Pedagogical Trends**

The Main branch of our library system, King Library, is open 24/7 during the semester and is a central part of our campus. Research assistance is available virtually and physically from 8AM-10PM. This is a high level of coverage, but we know we are likely missing opportunities to provide reference and instruction during the off-hours. Web video tutorials that would be available 24/7 at the users' fingertips could go a long way towards closing this gap (especially if video tutorials regarding current course content and projects were available). In addition, the University as a whole is stressing the concept of the inverted classroom in curriculum design. The inverted classroom as proposed by Lage and Platt<sup>2</sup>, is a style of teaching where typical classroom activities, such as lectures, are done outside of class via Web tutorials and recorded lectures or videos, while collaborative group work, discussion, and hands-on activities are done in class. The rationale for this style of teaching is to have a curriculum design that appeals to all types of learners, not just those learners who respond well to lectures. Creating Web video tutorials fits within this pedagogical philosophy.

## **Institutional Resources and Relationships**

After considering these trends, we considered our ability to produce videos based on our resources. Miami University Libraries has a highly advanced technology lab called the Center for Information Management which includes all of the necessary software and hardware for advanced video editing. Although most of what we accomplished could be done without these advanced technologies, having these resources made for a more polished and consistent tone across the series of videos. With the pieces in place for a wide-scale video production project, we decided to begin a pilot, starting with a Marketing course that already included a high level of librarian interaction. We then extended the project to produce videos for two other courses: English 111 and Educational Leadership 100.

We chose the marketing course as it was being redesigned using the inverted classroom philosophy. The Business librarian, a key member of the pilot project, contacted the Department Chairman about the course redesign effort and offered the library's services as a way to more fully integrate information fluency in the classroom. As a major part of the class, students are required to develop a new "product" and create a corresponding marketing plan for that product. This requires a large amount of research on their part, including locating industry information, company data, consumer behavior and demographics, information on advertising costs, etc. Previously, the Business librarian conducted traditional one-shot Bibliographic Instruction sessions, demonstrating to the students the various print and online resources that they could use to prepare their marketing plans and providing

them with handouts to assist them in using the databases on their own. Often these sessions were held in traditional classrooms with no opportunity for hands-on participation by the students. With 15-20 sections of this class taught each semester, this was also a large time and resource commitment. We felt that by creating videos for the library resources used most often in this project, we could better reach the students and encourage more active hands-on learning. Since these databases are also used by students in a variety of other business classes, we knew the video tutorials would have value beyond this specific class as well.

## **Process**

The completed videos have four primary elements to them. The first element is a flash-based animation that served as both an introduction and conclusion to the content of the video. This animation presents the viewer with the libraries' brand and the title of the video. The first portion of the animation featured the words "Miami University Libraries Podcasting Series", followed by the appearance of a prominent podcasting icon. A unique soundtrack plays in the background. The entirety of the animation is about ten seconds. This animation serves primarily as a branding convention. All podcasts produced contained this animation and all future videos will contain it as well. This imparts consistency and trustworthiness.

The second element is a general introduction to the resource at hand. We felt that the best way to do this would be to film a librarian speaking briefly (1-2 minutes) about the importance and uses of the resource. These introductions were recorded using Mini-DV video cameras. The third element of the video is the actual explication of the databases themselves, usually 3-4 minutes. To do this, we produced step by step screencasts of the resource being used, replete with highlights, zoom-ins, and other callouts. We used Camtasia as our screencasting software. The final stage in the process of producing a video is a voiceover for the screencasted portions. This allows viewers watching the resource demonstration to follow along with voice instructions, again appealing to various types of learning styles. Creating the video voiceovers was achieved using Camtasia as well.

Once all these elements were produced, they were edited using Apple's Final Cut Pro, a software package available in our technology lab (Center for Information Management). Final Cut Pro allows videos to be exported in a variety of formats. The most common video formats for the Web are flash and QuickTime. For the purposes of the Marketing 291 course, though, we needed to export the videos as wmv files due to the IT department's Blackboard infrastructure. We also uploaded the videos to our institution's iTunes U site. For this purpose, the files were exported as either mov or mp4. We created an iTunes U organization for the libraries and made it open to all

members of the Miami University community. Any Miami user is able to access, view, download or subscribe to the library instruction videos.

## **Effects**

The immediate effect of this pilot project was to spark the interest of other librarians to produce similar video podcasts. Librarians deemed that two particular courses that featured the highest number of basic BI sessions were the best candidates for these video podcasts. Since creating the Marketing videos, we've produced basic videos for an Educational Leadership course and an engaging library tour video for an introductory English course. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the students in these courses are using and benefiting from these videos.

Specifically relating to the marketing course, the Business librarian was able to change her teaching style when speaking with the various sections of this class. She spent less time demonstrating the databases, since they would be able to watch the videos themselves (if they hadn't already) at the time of need. While the Business librarian still visited almost every section of the class (15 in all), she did not create handouts, thus saving on paper and printing. She also spent more time with the students discussing their marketing plans and how best to utilize the available resources for their specific products, particularly in the sessions which were held in computer labs. Some faculty still preferred the librarian to speak in their traditional classrooms, so in those cases she conducted a somewhat abbreviated traditional BI demonstration, referring them to the videos for additional information.

While feedback was just coming in as the semester concluded, it has been positive so far, both from students and faculty. Other librarians on campus also appreciate having the videos available, as they can refer students to them when the Business librarian is unavailable. Having the information available as a video allows students to dictate when and where they get the information and lets them focus on the specific database or question that they need help with at that point in time. Students can also try out the results on the computer immediately and return to the video if additional problems or questions arise. The videos are also ideal when questions arise during IM, email, or phone reference interactions about using these databases. Instead of typing or talking students through click by click instructions, we can now direct them to the iTunes U site where they can access the videos on their home computer or mobile device.

## **Future & Conclusion**

We believe that this pilot project will be extended from what we've been seeing thus far. We intend on convening a task force on video production with a responsibility to seek out interested librarians and to work collaboratively with them in the production

of similar videos. We also intend on embedding the videos in as many different places as possible. Not only would we like to see these videos in Blackboard courses and on iTunes U, but we would like them prominently featured on our Website.

The literature does not reveal much in-depth assessment when it comes to this medium for instruction. Once this project has been developed for awhile, we intend on conducting usability tests and assessment to see the extent of this medium's instructional efficacy.

Libraries services need to be continually adapting and evolving. Nothing, in effect, is ever finished. There has been a switch in the information-seeking behaviors from text-only (print or Web) to video and audio. There are countless video tutorials on the Web; from tying a Windsor knot to making polenta. Libraries, then, need to make another change. By adapting to the information-seeking behaviors of our core constituencies, we will ensure that the rich resources of our collections are utilized and that our users are receiving the best possible service we can provide.

## Endnotes

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